

Hey Tomorrow by hopestar789

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Language: English

Characters: Eleven/Jane H., J. Hopper, Joyce B., Mike W.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2018-07-30 11:37:07

Updated: 2018-07-30 11:37:07

Packaged: 2019-12-12 22:26:47

Rating: T

Chapters: 2

Words: 2,517

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: A series of snapshots from Hopper and El's life moving forward together. Title taken from a Jim Croce song by the same name.

1. Out of the Hellhole

He clung to her as much as she clung to him. Hopper felt her breathing, felt the slight rise and fall of her chest against his arms, heard her jagged breathing in his ear, and his throat tightened.

"You did good, kid." He felt her fingers clutch at his coat. He looked around at the falling demodogs, and he pulled her closer. "You did so good." He kissed her temple and glanced out.

This was his job now.

Her cries echoed in the cavern, now dark and full of a softer, dim blue glow from the lights attached to the top of the elevator. The hot glare behind the gate had vanished. He held her until he felt her trembling still, and her breaths grew longer, easier. He took another look around and, in one motion, scooped El up in his arms and stood. With one free hand, he pushed the lever to his right, and the elevator began to rise.

El squirmed against him, trying to stand.

"No, no." Hopper rested his chin on her hair and shook it. "You just rest." He glared down at the floor of the cave, where he could just make out the slick outlines of the fucking dogs. "I'll get us out of this hellhole." He breathed in, the oil on her hair at odds with her sweet child, syrup scent.

His first foot hit the stairs when he remembered Owens. "Shit." He climbed the two more floors up. When he turned the corner, Owens sat, waiting, the gun in hand. He seemed wary but alert. His eyes drifted to Eleven.

Hopper nodded once, defiant. "All clear."

Owen's brow furrowed, and he leaned his head back against the wall. "She did it?"

"Closed the whole damn gate." Hopper's jaw set. He stood over the doctor and shifted Eleven in his arms. She didn't so much as look

over at Owens, and his chest swelled. "Now, I'm going to go get her tucked away, make sure she's safe, and I'll come back for you. That work, Doc?"

A moment passed, and Owens gave him a nod, the shadow of a smile on his face. "That will have to do."

Hopper walked through the main entrance, past the place where he had pulled Joyce away from Bob. He walked out the door and strolled by the sewer drain Eleven had crawled through a year ago in a rain storm. He walked straight to the Blazer and swung open the door. He set Eleven down as gingerly as he could, his hands fumbling with the shoulder strap. He lifted her feet, each white Ked so small against his palm. For a second, he leaned against the doorframe of the truck and put his head to his fist, trying to control his breathing. She was so small.

When he'd seen her collapse, when he had caught her so that her head would not hit the elevator floor and her arms hung limp from her body, he'd thought...but then she'd coughed, she coughed and she wrapped her arms around him.

Fingertips brushed his hand. He looked down, and she glanced up at him through slitted eyes, as if she were struggling to keep them pried open. "Okay?"

Those big, dark eyes watching him caused something to seize in his throat, but he swallowed it back and nodded at her. "Yeah," he nodded and reached out a hand to ruffle her hair. The grease they had used to push back her curls coated his fingers, but one corner of her mouth turned up in a smile. "I'm okay, kid. We're okay. I have to go get the doctor, but then we are dropping him off at the hospital. He's not going to do anything. I promise."

She nodded. "I know."

His throat clenched again at the soft stare, the trust. "Stay here." His voice was rough, brusquer than he intended, but that soft stare didn't change. "I'll be right back."

He found Owens again, slung his arm around his shoulders, and

hauled him out to the truck. As they walked past the same red stain where Bob's body had lain, Owens looked over at him. "The boy?"

"He's good. They got that thing out of him."

"How?"

Hopper figured, as a scientist, the man just couldn't help himself. "Heat. They burned it out of him."

Owens nodded. "They made him an inhospitable host." He gave Hopper a wry look of appreciation. "You people seem to make it out of this mess each time better than we have."

"Yeah, don't get started with us again, Doc. We're out of this. This place is finished." Hopper stared at him, inches from his face, about twelve feet from the car. "It's done."

Owens sighed. "I suppose you are right about that one."

He opened the back door, and the doctor pulled himself up and into the seat. Hopper shut the door and went to the driver's side. El watched him as he sat down, and he met her gaze.

"Ready?"

She was okay. She would be okay, tomorrow and the day after that. Because that was his job.

She nodded. "Let's get out of this hellhole."

Hopper shifted into reverse. "You said it, kid."

2. International House of Pancakes

He and Joyce had pulled out a pack of cards when they heard the auditorium doors swing wide. Kids came pouring out into parking lot, many of them skipping or pulling a friend behind them. The kids came walking – Will with some tall girl he'd never seen; Dustin, Lucas, and Max huddled together, their hands waving like they had spilled hot sauce all over them; and El with Mike.

His eyebrow and mouth shot up in a resigned grin. This was just how it was gonna be.

"Hey, guys!" Joyce walked forward, clutching her jacket closer to her in the cold. Hopper tilted his head – she hadn't seemed cold before.

"Hey, mom." Will's eyes darted to the ground, but he smiled over red cheeks.

"Well, bye, Zombie boy." Joyce's eyes narrowed, and Hopper took the cigarette from his mouth. But then the girl leaned in and pecked Will on the cheek. The girl glanced up at them, blushed, and ducked away. Will spun around, and Joyce's seething face went to thrilled in seconds. Hopper watched her try to hide that too.

"What, it's not like, I mean – " Will sputtered.

"I didn't say anything." Joyce pressed her lips together and shook her head, her hands in the air.

"Oh hoo, what's this? Whose kissing on the dance floor now, Will Byers?" Lucas chortled behind him.

Something twitched in his eye when Hopper thought of what other kids might have been kissing on the dance floor. El just stood, an arm wrapped around Mike's, a sweet, happy look on her face. She wasn't smiling, not really. It was like it was just a new default, a baseline. Being content.

Hopper sniffed, and he looked down and shuffled his feet.

"Well, the gym's pretty much wrapped up, so we're off." Jonathan and

Nancy walked up, their arms also linked. Jonathan nodded at Hopper, and Hopper dipped his head.

"Mike, c'mon, let's go." The way Nancy smiled and the way Jonathan was scanning over the gaggle of kids was ...old. Too old. It was as if they were watching some of their own kids instead of hauling around their siblings. Hopper took another drag from his cigarette and sighed.

"Wait, c'mon, give us just another 5 minutes to hang out – "

"Mike, it's cold, and you've already had your fun – "

Cue eye twitch.

" – and we would like to get in just a quick date, a hamburger and a milkshake just for us, before curfew."

Mike groaned in protest, but El touched his arm. He glanced at her, his face lightening. "I will see you next Tuesday." El smiled at him, and the boy's face eased up. He nodded.

"Next Tuesday. I'll be there."

With that, El reached up and kissed Mike right on the cheek. Hopper straightened up as Mike beamed. Then his eyes darted to Hopper's.

After Hopper felt his shock subside (maybe she was just copying that other girl, honestly (honestly he was being a fucking nitwit)), all he could manage was a grimace as he placed his hands on his hip.

Mike tempted a small, tentative smile and looked back to El. "I'll see you soon."

"C'mon, El." Hopper walked up and put a hand to the back of her shoulders. Her eyes darted up, hesitant, and then so bright. Hopper breathed in, his chest suddenly tight. Against his better judgment, he grinned back.

"Okay, well, you two have fun." Jonathan and Nancy walked away, and Mike trailed them, glancing back every four seconds or so at El.

"You got this?" He glanced over at the other kids and then at Joyce, and Joyce waved him away.

"I've got this. You guys go on and get out of here." She gave El a quick side hug and kissed the top of her head. Hopper smiled at the sight. She never had to try to care. "We'll be by sooner or later too, I'm sure." Joyce knew he didn't want too many people gawking at him in the parking lot, seeing him and El together, not so soon. He'd only just put on the whole show at work about how he had just found out he had some long-lost daughter from a one-night stand forever ago. It had only been a week, and the news hadn't spread wide enough – people would talk about him and some weird girl.

El nodded. "Thank you." She peered around her for one second. "Goodbye." Her tone was so solemn, so precise, that it was weird to hear the amount of joy it had in it. Hopper heard, though.

They climbed into the truck and adjusted their seatbelts. As Hopper reversed and then pulled out onto the road, he snuck a glance over at her. She sat with her hands folded on her lap, looking straight ahead, but she could not hide the smile on her face. She glanced once at Hopper, then back out the window, blushing.

He rolled his eyes, but something in his cheeks pinched. "So...how was it?"

"It was..." Another smile. "Fun."

"Fun?"

She glanced sideways at him, a shit-eaten grin on her face. "Yes."

Hopper took a left and sighed. This damn grinning was contagious. He looked over at El. "I'm glad. So... did you show off any of the dance moves I taught you?"

She shot him a look, her eyebrows narrowing like they did the first time she saw him shake to Jim Croce.

"Awww, c'mon, you guys do not know what you are missing out on. That's some of my best stuff right there."

El shook her head and looked away. Still smiling.

"So..." Hopper shrugged. "The dancing...how do you guys do it these days? Is it like all just one big circle dancing or... you know, two people dancing?"

El answered immediately, her tone the same as when she figured out a math problem she'd been working on. "Both." Then she must have figured out what she told him, because her eyes went down to her lap, and the blush deepened.

Hopper shook his head. He had a real feeling he was going to be gaining some gray hairs these next few years. It wasn't a bad feeling. He glanced back over at El again. Her fingers played with the fabric of her dress.

"Yeah, I hope you like that dress. Now, I suppose I'm going to have to go out again, next year, and find a whole other dress."

El looked over, eyes wide. "Next year?"

Hopper nodded. "Oh yeah." They came to a stoplight. "For, uh, Hallowball or Homecoming Ball or whatever dance they have these days in high school. Can't remember what they call it, but I can tell you one thing: they always mean high-cost dresses." He glanced over at her, his eyebrows raised, and then he saw her face.

"Next year, there will be another dance." She sat back in the chair, dazed.

Radiance. Pure, uncontained radiance, the kind only kids could have. He saw the blue hairband still wrapped around her wrist, and, for a moment, he had this bizarre image. He saw El standing in a different blue dress, like a sundress, with Sara, who was wearing white, both in the middle of a field. He blinked, and it was gone. It was just El staring at him, her head now tilted in concern.

"Okay?"

Hopper shook his head a bit, and he felt a pressure at the back of his eyes. "Yeah." His voice scratched out. He smiled at her. "Sorry." He looked back at the road. "Just thinking about dresses."

El narrowed her eyes, but she leaned back in her chair.

The light changed green. In the sliver of a second, Hopper decided to turn right instead of left.

El looked back, confused. "Where are we going?"

Hopper shrugged. "Thought we might get dessert."

He pulled up at the stop about five miles outside of town. As he watched El getting out, she stared up, reading the sign. He gave her a minute. Her face scrunched.

"Inter...inter-nat-io..."

"International."

She blinked and studied it again. When she finished, she glanced back at him, suspicious. "International House of *Pancakes*?"

"Trust me on this."

In the booth, the hostess dumped them at a booth and handed them menus, still coated with some grease from the last occupants' fingers. Hopper set his down and opened El's up, glancing at the pictures of about 7 different kinds of waffles upside down. "Here. What'd I tell you?"

Her eyes lit up, and he could feel the air swishing under the table from where El was swinging her legs.

"Well, Chief." Rosa sidled up to the table, sweeping her pencil back behind her ear. "Good to see you back here. We haven't seen you in awhile."

Hopper nodded and grinned. "Yeah, well. Been busy."

"Too busy to visit an old lady like me? And who do we have here?"

El's eyes darted to his. She went stock still.

Hopper nodded at her. "Rosa, this is my daughter."

"Your daughter! Well – " She jumped, startled at her own voice. Rosa smiled to cover it. "And what's your name, you pretty thing?"

El looked from him to her. She held out a hand, the way he'd taught her, and said in her steady, solemn voice, "Jane Eleanor Hopper."

Rosa took a step back to shake her hand. "It is so nice to meet you." Her gaze snapped back to him. "Hopper, well, I..." She shrugged, embarrassed. "Well, I never knew you had a daughter."

Hopper grinned, and El smiled back. He shrugged. "Apparently, I do."